



Temperatures in the Workplace



Employers have a legal duty under the *Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 (WHSW Regs 1992)* to: maintain a 'reasonable' temperature in the workplace.

Regulation 7 of the Workplace regs states:

1. During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings **shall** be reasonable.
2. A method of heating or cooling **shall not** be used which results in the escape into the workplace of fumes, gas or vapour of such character and to such an extent that they are likely to be injurious or offensive to any person.
3. A sufficient number of thermometers **shall** be provided to enable persons at work to determine the temperature in any workplace inside the building.

The Approved Code of Practice (ACoP) is part of the regulations. Paragraphs 42 and 43 refer to work rooms providing reasonable temperatures without the need for special clothing. Also that the temperatures in workrooms should normally be at least 16 degrees C unless much of the work involves severe physical effort, in which case the temperature should be at least 13 degrees C. These minimum temperatures may not apply in rooms, or parts of rooms where food or other products have to be kept cold or doors to the outside may have to be kept open.

Extremes of heat and cold can bring different problems causing discomfort, distress and illness in varying degrees. Although the regulations require a reasonable minimum temperature, they do not state a maximum temperature.

It has been stated in HSE guidance that the comfort zone is normally in the region of 16 degrees C to 30 degrees C and Usdaw has recommended to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that the maximum temperature inside the workplace should be 25 degrees C. Once temperatures climb above this, heat exhaustion starts. The TUC has called for an absolute maximum of 30 degrees C unless the work is of a heavy nature, then a maximum of 27 degrees C should be in force.

Some of the problems associated with working in extreme temperatures are:

Heat

Sweating, irritability, nausea, headaches, dizziness, fainting, muscle cramps, extra strain on the heart and ultimately heat stroke.

Cold

Bouts of shivering, loss of attention, fatigue, pain in extremities (nose, ears, fingers, toes) numbness, pins and needles, skin turns white, damage to blood vessels and frostbite.

Control Measures

For higher temperatures:

Air conditioning, ventilation, cooling fans, removal or isolation of heat sources, frequent rest breaks, constant supply of cold drinks, job rotation, relaxation of dress codes etc.

For colder conditions:

Local or central heating appliances, frequent rest breaks, constant supply of hot drinks, warm clothing, job rotation etc

The above lists are not exhaustive and different workplaces may require other solutions.

There is a lot of useful guidance on the HSE website on temperatures at work - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm>

Copies of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations, Approved Code of Practice and Guidance can be downloaded free of charge from HSE Books - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg244.pdf>

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